

Fern of the Forest by J.L. Thaxton | Reading Guide

General Questions:

1. *Fern of the Forest* opens with two truths and a lie. Did you guess which statement was the lie? What surprised you most about getting to know Fern?
2. What is wrong with Fern in the early chapters? How long has she been sick? When did you figure out that her illness was not a physical sickness but is related to being a mythical creature?
3. Describe the town of Varina. Would you prefer to live in a big city (like New York City) or a small town (like Varina)? Talk through the pros and cons of both locations for yourself and for Fern.
4. Fern feels better after just a few hours in Varina. Why do you think this happens? (For the leader: this is a great opportunity for readers to speculate about what might happen in the future for Fern, sharing theories about how Fern's madremonte powers are related to nature.)
5. Going to a new school is always challenging, and being new in the middle of the year can be even harder than joining at the start of a new year. What things make Fern's transition to school in Varina easy, hard, and strange? If you've ever had to move to a new school in the middle of a school year, was there anything about her experience you could relate to?
6. Cam and Shay both befriend Fern quickly, though she is more reluctant with Cam. Describe how their friendships grow, then solidify during the treasure hunt team building challenge. What characteristics do Cam and Shay have that make them good friends?
7. When Fern's powers begin to show, she reaches out to Cam and Shay to try to understand what is happening. What powers do her new friends have? What do they reveal to her about the reason they all live in Varina?
8. What did you learn about Fern's powers through each of the following situations as she is coming into her powers:
 - a. Discovering the dying deer
 - b. The teens with the spray paint
 - c. The man cutting down a sapling
9. Ava May comes to Varina to visit because Fern has sequestered herself after injuring Cam. What does Ava May do to help Fern? In what ways does she act as a bridge between Fern's worlds of NYC and Varina?
10. Before reading this book, had you ever heard of a madremonte?
11. Fern's friends each bring unique assistance to Fern as she navigates her new powers. Describe how Ava May, Shay, and Cam contribute to Fern's madremonte practice and education.

12. What surprised you most about the ending? Would you like to read more about Fern and her forest protector powers? Where do you hope the story will next take Fern, Shay, Cam, and the town of Varina?

Thematic Questions:

1. In the opening of the story, Fern feels very isolated because of her sickness even though her mom, Theresa, and Ava May do everything they can to include and help her. Later she feels isolated because of the move to Varina, and then because of her powers. Think back to a time when you felt isolated, perhaps because of sickness or moving. What friendships or people helped you? (For the leader: if this is too personal for group discussion, consider using this question as a journaling prompt.)
2. *Fern of the Forest* highlights many realistic ways that people interact with each other, be it children or teens with their parents, or peers to peers. What are some of the scenarios from the story in which we see themes of Friendship and Community thoughtfully examined? Which character did you relate to the most? Why?
3. Coming of Age is a major theme of *Fern of the Forest*. In what ways do you see it played out in the story? How do the emergence and development of Fern's madremonte powers parallel common adolescent coming of age struggles and milestones?



Fern of the Forest is a contemporary fantasy written by J.L. Thaxton.

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